



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Montana's First Cases of Flu Reported in Yellowstone County

Billings, MT – The Yellowstone City-County Health Department, in conjunction with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, has confirmed Montana's first cases of influenza A in Yellowstone County. The cases were confirmed in an unrelated male and female. Flu activity in neighboring states continues to be sporadic.

Dr. Doug Moore, chief of public health services and assistant health officer for the Yellowstone City-County Health Department said, "Last year, we reported our first case of flu the week of December 6th, 2005, so it appears that we are lagging slightly behind where we were last year." He went on to say, "Type A influenza, which was confirmed in two Yellowstone County residents, is the most common and represents most seasonal flu outbreaks. The flu is highly contagious, therefore flu shots are greatly recommended not only for those people in high-risk categories, but for everyone."

The best way to protect yourself from seasonal flu is by getting a flu shot. The Unified Health Command (St. Vincent Healthcare, Billings Clinic and the Yellowstone City-County Health Department) estimates that nearly 40,000 people have received a flu vaccine in Yellowstone County thus far this year. "We encourage anyone who has yet to get a flu shot to do so," said Moore.

Flu season traditionally peaks in January or February so getting a flu vaccine in December is still beneficial in protecting against seasonal influenza. About two

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weeks after getting a flu shot, antibodies develop that protect against influenza virus infection.

Because there is an ample supply of vaccine available, no one should have to unnecessarily suffer from the flu. People who experience the sudden on-set of flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache, tiredness (can be extreme), dry cough, sore throat, nasal congestion, and body aches should see their healthcare provider. If caught early, the effects of flu can be lessened with antiviral medications.

Flu-like symptoms generally start one to four days after the virus enters the body. An individual with the flu is contagious one day before feeling sick. Adults can continue to pass the flu virus to others for another three to seven days after symptoms start. Children can pass the virus for longer than seven days. "Even if you feel well, you may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick," said Moore.

To help protect against the flu virus, Moore stresses the importance of frequent hand washing, avoiding close contact with people who are ill, covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing or coughing, disinfecting surfaces such as door knobs, telephones, etc. and if you are ill, staying home from work or school to help prevent others from becoming ill.

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